

Statement for testimony at the House of Commons Standing Committee for the Status of Women

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by Ms Krista Carle

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Good morning Committee Members I thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. My name is Krista Carle and I served 19 years in the RCMP as a regular member. In August of 2010 I had to leave the workplace on a medical discharge due to chronic PTSD-Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and underlying depression and anxiety. I ended my career voluntarily as I was unable to function in my role as a police officer. I appear before you today to share some of my experiences concerning sexual harassment in the workplace. I also appear here today to give a voice to my female colleagues, so many of whom have suffered the same abuses and mistreatment in the RCMP as I have.

In November 2011 I contacted the media after seeing a CBC news story involving Catherine Galliford and the systematic sexual harassment she experienced during her career.

Like Catherine, I came forward publically at great personal cost. I felt it was important to support Catherine who I trained at Depot with in the spring and summer of 1991.

Lives and Careers Destroyed and the devastating impacts of PTSD on families and relationships

The RCMP is an organization that has survived based on keeping certain classes of people in positions of inferiority. The sad truth is that women are one of those classes of people they are deliberately holding back and treating as inferior.

Women in the RCMP who have suffered abuses and sexual harassment in the workplace often lose everything. They lose the people they are, their self-esteem and self-confidence, their health and their careers. It affects their relationships with partners, friends and family. The toll is incredibly high. Like a victim of domestic violence who is repeatedly told she is worthless, they start believing it. I know this to be the case because it has all happened to me, and I know countless others suffering the same fate.

Those of us living with the debilitating effects of PTSD and depression caused by the abuse we suffered at work can hardly leave our homes, we don't feel safe much of the time and struggle to even take care of ourselves. I for one not only lost my marriage because of the devastating effects of PTSD, but also my kids.

Since all this happened to me, I have developed friendships with a number of other RCMP women who have been through similar ordeals. The places and names are different but there is a common thread that runs through all of our stories. In fact, hearing their stories has lit a flame inside of me – given me the inspiration and courage to speak up. I simply cannot in good conscience sit back and be idle about all of this any longer, too many people are still suffering. The thing is, the mistreatment does not stop the minute someone's medical doctor diagnoses them with depression, anxiety or PTSD. To the contrary – many of us have become sicker as a result of the process that ensues as you begin your journey into healing and complaining about the mistreatment. The RCMP system for handling such cases is cold, unfeeling, intrusive and my colleagues and I have all endured further harassment by the RCMP Health Services unit once we became ill. The very unit that is supposed to be there to provide care and support to members who are ill or disabled, is often doing just the opposite.

I know so many women in similar circumstances to my own who had so much potential – women with incredible skills and aptitudes – women who were destined for great careers within the RCMP – who's lives are now completely shattered. It is truly impossible to fully describe the impact that years of sexual harassment and abuse has had on us all, but it is what is compelling me to be here today to speak on their behalf.

Reluctance to Come Forward....Fear and Intimidation, Blame the victim

What many of us who have been pushed to our furthest limits have had no other option than making a human rights complaint or pursuing legal action have learned, the process of our complaints can take years to resolve. The financial costs of these endeavours place an overwhelming burden on the victims, creating further difficult circumstances for them to contend with. And we know that this is a tactic used by the RCMP. Bankrupt the victim by dragging the cases out so that they have no choice but to give up once they have run out of money to carry on with their case. This happens, even when there is a stack of physical evidence to support the victim's claims. The RCMP's strategy is to stall, drag it out – fight it, defend themselves at all costs. And because the RCMP is supported by the Government of Canada with a limitless supply of lawyers through the Department of Justice, this is a game they can afford to play. It is a different story for the victims who have already lost their careers, their health and now their financial security. Many are often forced to give up and accept the discharge, which was the case for me.

When you hear about the RCMP mailing letters of termination to members who have been on long-term sick leave, this is often what is happening. Because the RCMP has dragged out their complaints and lawsuits instead of taking decisive measures and actions to resolve the issues and to hold the harassers and abusers accountable, these people have been off duty sick for several years with mounting legal bills. And now, after all they have already been through, they must face the daunting prospect of being fired by the very employer who abused them, caused their disability and refused to resolve it.

What may be even worse yet is that while you go through the process of a complaint, you are often vilified, the RCMP place you in the penalty box and you become labeled a 'troublemaker' who is off-duty mad. It's a system of blaming the victim.

No wonder so many women continue to suffer in silence and fear coming forward.

The Canadian Public Complaint Commission's recent study showed that only four percent of the complaints involved sexual harassment. If you look at the women who have come forward in the class action lawsuit spearheaded by my troop mate Janet Merlo and being handled by Klein Lyons lawfirm, they number close to 300. That in itself is proof that women are afraid to complain – until there is a safe place for them to go. (attrition rates also demonstrate this....significantly more women in the RCMP quit by the 20 year mark of service compared with men)

What makes it even more difficult for women to come forward is seeing what happens to others who have complained. The complainer is often ostracized, bullied, labeled 'weak', becoming the target of vicious rumours, overt acts of discrimination and humiliation and experience workplace mobbing.

If that isn't bad enough, I know of cases where the internal investigators have called in the subject of the complaint (the respondent/accused) and shown him the victim's statement prior to being asked to give his own statement so he could rebut hers. No one followed up with her to ask whether the story he made up could be corroborated – instead it was accepted as fact. Once that investigation was concluded and deemed 'unsubstantiated', the male member was then asked to review the findings to see if there was anything he would like to change.

In another case that I am familiar with, the 'band of brothers' at the senior management level circulated emails indicating they would have to take measures to protect the accused – as he was a hard worker.

Because the internal investigations are handled internally with no external body to oversee them, the women in the RCMP do not stand a chance of getting a fair, unbiased investigation or outcome.

There is no justice system within the Force...the senior officers are the judge, the jury, the prosecutors and, in some cases, also the offender, or a close personal friend of the offender.

Under these circumstances, is it really reasonable to expect a woman to come forward and complain? Would any of you?

There are countless women who have dared to complain internally – only to have the investigation concluded as unsubstantiated – forcing these women to carry on in their current environments of harassment, now with the added pressure of having complained about their bosses with no resolution. You can only imagine how this serves to worsen their situations in the workplace. The cases I am speaking of are not historic, despite what you may hear RCMP leaders say publically, I know of several cases happening at present.

We have heard from the RCMP Commissioner that he takes the issue seriously – yet when women come forward to complain, he issues a statement of defense that further victimizes the individual by characterizing her as a lying, alcoholic, slut.... as is the case of my troop mate, Catherine Galliford. Here we are Canadian citizens – in a country that prides itself on equality and fairness to all..... and this is how we are treating the women who've dedicated their careers to keeping the citizens of this country safe. How can this government boldly go into other countries around the world and dictate and demand human rights practices and policies, while allowing this to go on in our own backyard? I call this hypocrisy. Are we publically stoning women of the RCMP after they have reported a sex assault or sexual harassment? No, but I would call what is being done to my colleague- who has been brutally victimized by her employer - nothing less than a public verbal stoning, with nearly as devastating effects.

Civilian female members/municipal employees have no recourse

The CPC's report also found that a vast majority of the complaints came from regular members. It is imperative, Mr Chair, that members of parliament and the Government of Canada recognize the reasons why that was the case. Over the course of my career, I worked with many public service and civilian staff, and witnessed astonishing abuses take place at the hands of their superiors and other male regular members. The only thing worse than being a female regular member in the RCMP, is being a Civilian female member.

You see, the civilian staff, which comprises of several thousand civilian members, public service and municipal employees are treated as second and third class citizens within the Force, with absolutely no rights.

I believe Civilian females need a voice on this issue here today because their treatment is often worse because of their informal status as "second and third class citizens" in the RCMP. I heard Robin Kers with the Union of Solicitor General Employees, who testified before this Committee last month, say this about the Civilian and public service contingent of the RCMP, and I quote: "What makes them vulnerable is the hierarchal structure of the RCMP and the fact that these people have a level of authority, and style of training, that causes them to deal with people in a certain way" "They carry guns and have the capacity to do things to the normal citizen that civilians don't have."

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/life/RCMP+civilian+workers+vulnerable+harassment/7967033/story.html#ixzz2L8cnRRQN>

He was bang on. I know several female civilian and public service employees who have been severely mistreated by the RCMP. I have witnessed it myself throughout my career, civilian female staff were

often demeaned, spoken down to, bullied and harassed. When civilians complain they are told to just suck it up, and move on. Or worse, they are told that if they complain it will destroy their career and any chance of advancement within the RCMP. There is simply no recourse for these valuable members.

While Public Service Employees within the RCMP do have Union representation, they are often treated with disrespect by regular members because their union has no authority over the RCMP members. The Civilian members, on the other hand, have no protection whatsoever.

The Way Forward.... Feasible solutions to the problem

The single most important factor to bring about meaningful change within the RCMP to address workplace harassment is acknowledgment and recognition of the issues as they exist today.

The second most important factor is a strategy and plan to address the issues as they exist today.

We have yet to achieve either.

The RCMP say that they are acknowledging that there is a problem... but they have yet to come forward and support anyone one of their complainants.

They are paying lip service to this issue but they are not saying anything to support the idea that they truly get the extent and severity of the problem. I have yet to hear an RCMP leader come forward and acknowledge that they are dealing with a number of sexual harassment complaints and lawsuits that have caused their employees to become very sick....that the mistreatment and abuse has shattered their employees' lives. I have yet to hear that they are motivated to fix it because they care for their employees and are concerned for their well-being and want to make it right for them. They have access to all the information they need to establish that the sickness of sexual harassment that runs rampant in the RCMP has made hundreds of their employees sick ... yet they won't come out and say it. How can the government possibly expect them to resolve something they won't even acknowledge is happening?

As important, the RCMP has yet to acknowledge that the systemic abuse and harassment exists as much at the top levels of the organization as it does with the lower ranks. What is one to do if their offender is An Assistant or Deputy Commissioner? Can the RCMP reasonably say that that person's internal complaint will be thoroughly investigated without prejudice or bias or interference? Of course they can't. And what is to come of the fate of that employee who has complained about a senior ranking officer – after the internal investigation deems her complaint as unsubstantiated -- which would be inevitable in today's environment and system. I'll tell you what would happen. Her career would be over. It's as simple as that. There would be no safe place for her to go because the system of fear and intimidation is so widespread, the mistreatment and label of 'trouble maker' would follow her wherever she went. There would be no way that person could be safely reintegrated into the RCMP under the current system.

I'm here tell you that the proposed solutions before parliament at this time to resolve the widespread systemic harassment and sexual harassment issues within the RCMP are not going to work. Frankly speaking, it is rather unfair to expect a Commissioner who has been a product of the RCMP environment himself since 1986 to bring about the necessary changes and solutions to resolve these serious issues.

The solutions outlined in the Gender and Respect RCMP Action Plan woefully under estimate and misrepresent the severity, and nature of the problem.

The plan fails to recognize just how embedded, systemic and engrained the attitudes and behaviours that lead to the harassment are within the culture. Our government has to understand that most of the RCMP leaders (if we can call them that), like Mr. Paulson, have been part of the organization for their entire career span, and have no idea what a harassment-free workplace looks like. It is so entrenched that they

honestly can't see it. Even if they could see it, there is simply no real motivation to change their ways, their attitudes and behaviours. Why should they? These attitudes are serving them well.... It keeps the men, the bullies and the harassers in their positions of power, it keeps the women out of the competition and in roles of servitude and oppression. Why would they want to change that? Opening up the culture to one where men and women are treated fairly and as equals means they would have to share the power.

Believe me, without some heavy outside influence, these attitudes will not change.

It doesn't take an expert in Human Resources to tell you that the current Harassment training, which entails of sitting at a computer and reading some material and then answering a quick quiz is not going to be enough to change behaviors within the RCMP. Frankly, I am not even sure if you put members into an intensive classroom setting for a full week of training, they would ever really get it. Until members are shown better behaviours and taught better values – not just at Depot, but from every supervisor and leader they encounter throughout their careers, there is little chance they will change.

From online harassment training, the other solutions only go downhill. The other proposed solution presented by Commissioner Paulson was to raise the quota of females in the RCMP. This is also extremely shortsighted. It's the equivalent of sending more kids into the home of a pedophile in the hopes that would help stop the abuse from taking place. Until you take real, meaningful action to improve the circumstances for the women who are already there to ensure they have a harassment-free workplace, any attempts to bring in additional female members would be irresponsible.

Further, I know I speak on behalf my colleagues when I say that legislative amendments proposed in Bill c 42 are only going to serve to worsen the current situation. Empowering those in positions of power in an organization fraught with issues of abuses of power is only going to pour more fuel on an already blazing inferno. This bill will only serve to give more authority to the RCMP bullies and harassers to the extent that if any of their employees 'get out of line' and complain or speak up against the harassment and abuse, their bosses can label them as 'bad apples' and have them dismissed.

The RCMP management is not the group who need more power. That is what got us into this situation in the first place. To the contrary – what the RCMP needs is an oversight body, to handle complaints and internal investigations to ensure that they are handled fairly, swiftly and effectively. It is the only solution that will work. What the RCMP needs most, is outside help, third party supervision through a massive culture change, live, 'in person' classroom training - and an external investigation body to handle these complaints. The members need third party arbitration of some kind. That is really the only solution that will work as the behaviours of abuse and harassment have become as steeped in RCMP traditions and belief systems as their red serge and Stetsons.

Public Support

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible amount of support that my colleagues and I have experience since coming forward.

A Facebook Site was created to support members that need assistance with their complaints, spearheaded by another troop mate of mine, Janet Merlo, who set the course for a civil action against the RCMP –a class action lawsuit for women who have claims of 'workplace conflict' against the RCMP. I want to take this time to thank everyone who has commented there, or shown their support to my colleagues and I in other ways. We could not do this without you all, and we are very grateful that Canadians have taken such an interest in our plight.

In closing Mr. Chair, and members of Parliament, I would just like to emphasize what motivated me to testify here today. I am here to be a voice to the hundreds, maybe thousands of women who are suffering in the RCMP.

I want those women who are feeling alone, depressed, despondent, and looking to understand why they are being treated differently – to know that they are not alone with their feelings of isolation and mistreatment. To all the women in the RCMP who have been asking themselves: “am I doing something wrong?” Why are the men I work for so mean, so difficult, so dismissive, always saying sexually explicit things to me and about me?” I say: “This is not your fault, and you should not have to tolerate these inappropriate behaviours in the workplace. You don’t have to suffer in silence. I am here for you, as are so many other of our females comrades. I am here to tell you we will not stand by while those who are empowered to enforce the very laws they are breaking in the workplace continue to get away with it.”

I sincerely hope that the opportunity to be here with you today sharing what I know will lead to real meaningful change and give the deserving women of the RCMP a feeling of hope that things will get better. I want them to know other women out there care about their circumstances and will go to bat for them to make their workplace a safe and harassment-free and that they deserve to be treated as equals. This is their birthright and their rights as citizens of this great country. I want them to know that until that day comes, we will not be silent.